

HOW-TO GUIDE: TEACHING AT THE RIGHT LEVEL (TaRL)

What is TaRL?

- The **Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)** approach targets the root of the learning crisis by transforming the structures that lead to it. The approach was developed and pioneered by Indian non-governmental organization Pratham¹ in the early 2000s in response to the failures of the education system.
- At the classroom level, TaRL is a teaching approach that uses a simple testing tool to assess and then group children according to their learning level rather than their age or grade. For a period each day, children at middle to upper primary school level dedicate time to foundational skills, supported by an accelerated learning methodology. They are then regularly assessed, using the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) assessment tool, rather than relying only on end-of-year examinations for testing.
- TaRL seeks to ensure that all children learn. Its goal is to ensure basic foundational skills for all, including clearly articulated goals for basic reading and maths.

Why is TaRL needed?

The severe learning crisis affecting many countries across the world has not spared Nigeria. The country is faced with the twin crises of a large and growing out-of-school population and a sizeable portion of children who, despite going to school, do not acquire foundational skills in the first few years of schooling.

- One in three² children are out of school³ (10.2 million at primary school level and 8.1 million at junior secondary level⁴).
- Three in four children cannot read for meaning or solve a simple maths problem.⁵
- School dropout rates remain high and signal systemic inefficiency, with 11 per cent of enrolled learners annually dropping out at all grade levels from primary to junior secondary school.⁶
- A total of 63 per cent of children in rural areas and around 84 per cent of children in the lowest economic quartile cannot read at all.⁷

What are the preconditions for success?

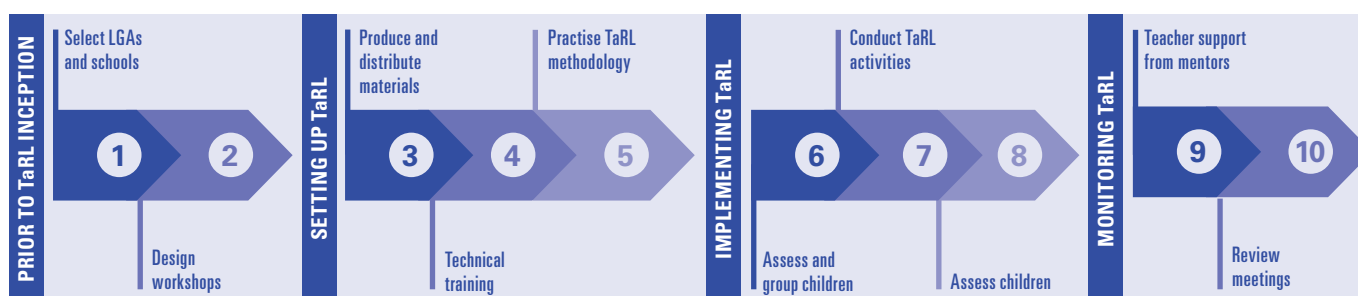
Rigorous evidence on TaRL, and lessons learned from implementing and scaling-up TaRL, point to a number of requirements for effective and optimized implementation of this approach by teachers.⁸ These include assessment, training, classroom methodology and materials, mentoring, measurement and review. Other aspects include:

- **Understanding the local context** and moulding the delivery model accordingly.
- **Mobilizing stakeholders at all levels** (government, community leaders, parents) ahead of time is key to increasing their support and buy-in for the programme.
- **Mentoring and monitoring support** for facilitators beyond the initial training is necessary to keep teachers on track and to ensure the quality of the delivery of TaRL.
- **Dedicated time** for TaRL instruction is required for teachers to focus on foundational skills. Without this, they may revert to traditional ways of teaching, including focusing on curriculum completion.

Standard operating procedure

Prior to TaRL inception

1. **Selection of Local Government Areas (LGAs) and schools** is done collaboratively with the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and/or the ministry of education and the donor. The main factors considered during selection are need, political alignment, security in the area, and availability of funding and how it assists with scale-up. Engaging all schools in the smallest administrative unit, for example, an LGA, during the pilot stage can be critical to developing systems and processes that can be easily replicated and thus support the scale-up process.
2. **Design workshops** are held ahead of implementation in collaboration with the ministry:
 - **Programme design workshop:** The delivery model (duration, frequency, subjects, facilitators) is determined and key support teams and governance systems are identified (trainers, mentors, programme management support).
 - **Teaching and learning materials adaption workshop:** Materials are reviewed and updated periodically following TaRL best practices while also ensuring they are appropriate for the evolving context and cost-effective.
 - **Monitoring and measurement workshop:** Assessment and monitoring tools are reviewed and updated periodically. In addition, systems for mentoring and monitoring support, data flow and data use are established. These systems are aligned with existing government systems and processes to enable scale-up and integration with government systems.
 - **State, LGA and school-level orientation** is conducted among key stakeholders to ensure they are aware of the benefits of TaRL and what their roles and responsibilities



are. These stakeholders include state and LGA officials, head teachers, teachers, school-based management committees (SBMCs), learners and parents.

Setting up TaRL

3. **TaRL materials are produced and distributed** to teachers and pupils, in preparation for classroom implementation.
4. **Technical training is delivered at state, LGA and school level** for the various actors of TaRL (master trainers, mentors and facilitators). Training includes:
 - The TaRL methodology
 - Classroom management
 - Assessment and grouping
 - Mentoring
 - Data collection, management and/or analysis.
5. **Master trainers and mentors are required to practise the TaRL methodology** in a live environment for a minimum period of 15 days, before they can deliver the training themselves.

Implementing TaRL in the classroom

6. **Children in grades four to six are assessed and grouped** according to their learning levels, and not by age or class.
7. **Teachers conduct TaRL activities for an hour and a half to two hours a day.** Activities are done with the whole group, in small groups, or individually.
8. **Children are assessed a minimum of three times** during a TaRL programme cycle: at baseline, midline and endline. Children can be moved to different learning-level groups between large assessments to aid accelerated progress.

Mentoring and monitoring TaRL

9. **Teachers are provided ongoing support from mentors** at multiple levels. There are two types of mentors: head teachers are school-based mentors, while Quality Assurance Officers and School Support Officers from LGEA and SUBEB are LGA and state-level mentors. Mentoring is a key component of TaRL.
10. **Review meetings at state, LGA and school levels** are held to discuss challenges and develop solutions. Review meetings are held after baseline, midline and endline surveys to reflect on learning outcome results and drive action at all levels of the government system. LGA and school-level review meetings can be held more frequently to enable better coordination and more frequent course correction.

Sustainability for scale-up

- Support states to develop costed scalability- and sustainability-plans that can be included in state budgets and plans.
- Keep costs at a minimum and avoid financial incentives or costs that would be challenging for the government to absorb over time.
- Integrate support processes and systems into existing government systems.



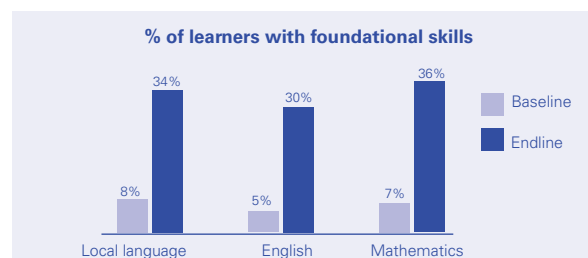
Lessons learned

- Children who have been in school for a few years learn quickly through this approach, and those at the lowest levels of learning benefit the most.
- TaRL is flexible enough to be adapted for a variety of different contexts and models.
- Ensuring adequate technical support, defining roles and responsibilities, and measuring success are crucial for strengthening TaRL implementation in school systems.
- Practice classes are essential for training and mentoring. Allowing time for master trainers and mentors to teach TaRL lessons can improve the efficacy of teacher training and the quality of mentoring support during implementation.
- Strengthening stakeholders' capacity for data collection, management and analysis is crucial for better managing the programme and for informing decision-making and course correction.
- Starting with a pilot allows teams to address challenges early on instead of having to course-correct while implementing at scale.



Key achievements

- In 2021/22, TaRL was implemented in 1,212 schools across five states – Adamawa, Borno, Kano, Kebbi and Yobe – and reached more than 331,000 pupils.
- Improved reading and numeracy learning outcome achievement for both girls and boys:



- In 2022/23, TaRL was scaled up to include an additional three states across northern Nigeria: Kaduna, Bauchi and Gombe.
- Several state governments have chosen to direct their own funds towards piloting and expanding TaRL programming, signalling the potential for expenditure on TaRL to be absorbed into government budgets.

Endnotes

- 1 Pratham is one of the largest non-governmental organizations in India. It works towards the provision of quality education for underprivileged children in that country.
- 2 This calculation is based on the total number of out-of-school children at primary and lower secondary levels.
- 3 Universal Basic Education Commission, *Personnel Audit and Digest of Basic Education Statistics in Nigeria 2018, 2019*.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2021/22, Survey Findings Report*, NBS and UNICEF, Abuja, 2021.
- 6 Annual School Census, 2019/20.

- 7 Federal Government of Nigeria, Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Sustainable Development Goals (OSSAP-SDGs) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Education in Nigeria: Evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of SDG4, OSSAP-SDGs and UNICEF Nigeria*, Abuja, 2022.
- 8 Banerjee, Abhijit, Rukmini Banerji, James Berry, Esther Duflo, Harini Kannan, Shobhini Mukherji, Marc Shotland and Michael Walton, 'Mainstreaming an effective intervention: Evidence from randomized evaluations of "Teaching at the Right Level" in India', Research Working Paper No. 22746, National Bureau of Economic, October 2016, <www.nber.org/papers/w22746>, accessed 15 April 2023.



Contact: Saadhna Panday-Soobrayan, Chief Education • UNICEF Nigeria, spanday@unicef.org